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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000103

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FOR EUR/SE MCLEGG-TRIPP AND EMELLINGER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [OEXC](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [CY](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: INTERNAL, EXTERNAL WOES THREATEN T/C "STATE U"

REF: 06 NICOSIA 1767

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher for reason 1.5 (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: North Cyprus's Eastern Mediterranean University is "in dire trouble," worries Vice Rector for Student Affairs Samil Ergodan and Senior Advisor to the Rector Johann Pillai. Beset by labor strife, empty "government" funding commitments, and cronyism at home, the "TRNC's state" university also faces external threats, including tough competition from Turkish and private universities and continuing exclusion from European Union educational programs like Erasmus. Labor leaders privately blame Rector Halil Guven for EMU's woes, and are seeking his ouster. Not all news is bad, however, as San Diego State University's January 24 decision to continue its exchange program with EMU has buoyed spirits somewhat. END SUMMARY.

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The Good News First: The San Diego Saga  
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12. (C) Vice Rector Erdogan told Poloff January 22 that Rector Guven had traveled to the U.S. to make sure "no stone is left unturned" in protecting his university's exchange program with SDSU. About a year ago, he revealed, EMU had been caught off-guard when Central Connecticut State University pulled out of a similar exchange agreement. Select EMU faculty had built up professional relationships with Central Connecticut, but, according to Erdogan, the U.S. university was surprised by the ferocity of the Greek/Greek-Cypriot lobby against EMU, describing it as "an illegal entity on occupied land." Central Connecticut eventually abandoned the arrangement, he explained, although "academic cooperation" continued, including CCSU's recognition of EMU degrees.

13. (C) Thus schooled, EMU had not been surprised by the lobbying effort leveled at SDSU. Erdogan noted that the assistance from government and academic circles in the U.S. had made the difference this time around, however, and prevented the SDSU-EMU program from collapsing -- an outcome Erdogan said would have hurt undergrads already studying in the United States. Other (unnamed) American universities, incensed over the politicization of education in the SDSU case, had already contacted EMU about possible exchanges, he added.

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But More Dark Clouds than Silver Linings  
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14. (U) The north's "state" university currently is beset by labor strife. Last year, the teachers' union, DAU-Sen,

demanding and won automatic tenure for instructors irrespective of academic achievement; EMU's administration and "real professors," as Pillai termed them, grumbled in response. This year, the university's two non-academic unions, DAU-Per-Sen and DAU-Bir-Sen, went on strike during finals season, causing major headaches. Bad press in Turkey eventually forced the "government" to meet generous union demands, including a retroactive 26 percent COLA payment and an 8-18 percent raise for manual laborers.

15. (C) Shortly after their December victory, union reps told Poloff that EMU's real problem was Guven. He had mismanaged EMU's affairs, they alleged, preferring to grandstand on the international scene rather than focus on internal operations. The labor leaders admitted, however, that Guven faced problems not of his making, especially the "government's" decision not to reimburse EMU for cost-free tuition granted to thousands of T/C undergrads. Tens of millions in unpaid obligations had resulted, they claimed.

16. (C) The unions opposed joining forces with Guven to claim these arrears. Instead, according to EMU officials Erdogan and Pillai, they are determined to push Guven out of the Rectorship. Erdogan and Pillai claimed that the unions are pressuring the university senate to dismiss his hand-picked vice-rectors and replace them with "political party cronies and union lackeys." Pillai revealed that the unions January 30 requested the senate to call an emergency meeting, possibly within days, to vote "no confidence" in the Rector. Neither of these issues has landed yet on the governing body's agenda, however. Erdogan and Pillai hope the senate postpones these and similar moves until after the academic year concludes.

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"Isolation" -- Including Some Self-Isolation -- Affects  
Academia As Well  
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17. (C) Apart from the SDSU battle, EMU can point to few wins. One, however, is the university's expected acceptance into the European University Association (EUA), which assists member institutions in meeting new European education standards (AKA, the Bologna Process). EMU hopes EUA membership will win wider European recognition of its degrees. Before EMU can gain full EUA entry, however, the organization must conduct an exhaustive review of the university's management, academics and funding, which builds upon a self-evaluation. Rector Guven had hoped the EUA process would expose systemic problems at his university, Pillai reported; entrenched interests, however, including "TRNC officials," the unions, and department heads, already have dramatically censured the university's input. These interests claimed they wanted to avoid providing Greek Cypriots more ammunition against EMU; however, Pillai contended, they actually were motivated by the desire to avoid painful reforms at the university, which has long served as a source of patronage for political parties and cushy jobs for unionized workers.

18. (C) These "troglodytes" had begun to question the benefit of international associations like EUA, Pillai asserted. They instead argue for the university to turn inward and focus only on accreditation in Turkey. (Note: Nearly 50 percent of EMU's student body is foreign: 35 percent from mainland Turkey and 15 percent from other Muslim countries, particularly Jordan, Iran and the Gulf states. End note.) Private universities in the north are also complaining that Guven's globe-trotting focuses attention on Turkish Cypriot "isolation," scaring off potential students and further undermining the crucial tertiary education sector (Reftel). Pillai then recounted how "Finance Minister" Ahmet Uzun angrily had asserted to Guven, "We don't need a Harvard in the north," referring to Guven's international efforts to be

accepted to the EUA as well as the Community of Mediterranean Universities (CMU), the Federation of Universities of the Islamic World, and the International Association of Universities (IAU).

¶9. (C) Though the university finally won admission to these organizations, the end results have disappointed. Pillai provided one example: the IAU had failed even to list EMU in its global directory. The association claims it cannot list EMU under "Cyprus" and will not list the university under "Turkey," "TRNC," or any other designation. Having "close formal ties with UNESCO," he decried, the association had conveniently referred EMU's complaints to the world body "for a political decision;" UNESCO supposedly has referred the complaints back to IAU.

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All Their Chips on Erasmus  
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¶10. (C) EMU's application to the European Commission's Erasmus program illustrates the difficulties the university's ambiguous political and legal environment creates. Management has made acceptance into the program a top goal; they feel Erasmus would open the door to reputation-boosting academic exchanges, provide valuable accreditation, and confer an unimpeachable seal of European approval. However, EU program administrators have refused to correspond with EMU at its usual mailing address (which, like all other postal service in the "TRNC," is routed through Mersin, Turkey). Instead, when responding to EMU requests for information and so forth, Erasmus has automatically forwarded all exchanges through the ROC's Ministry of Education and Culture in the south. Pillai confidently assumed that such correspondence was "trashed." It was unclear to EMU administrators, Erdogan mentioned, whether Erasmus yet grasps that the political division of Cyprus means that EMU cannot go through the normal application process, which is usually initiated by an EU member state's education ministry.

¶11. (C) However, EMU planned to forge ahead by the end of January with its application; it has received mixed information, though, on whether to file with the European Commission or the European Council. Pillai, frustrated, stated that this just laid the groundwork for rejection on a technicality. EMU has already prepared a letter to the European Ombudsman to complain about the situation thus far

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and is preparing a possible appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

¶12. (C) Meanwhile, private Turkish Cypriot universities have decided to forego an EMU-style quest for accreditation, focusing instead on recruiting mediocre Turkish students who will return to the mainland after graduation, where "TRNC" degrees are honored. Similarly, Turkey appears to be bypassing the struggling EMU -- or so EMU interlocutors fear.

It backed the establishment of a "TRNC" campus by Ankara's renowned Middle East Technical University (METU), for example, and rumors abound that Bilkent and other well-known Turkish universities will establish satellite campuses in northern Cyprus.

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Comment  
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¶13. (C) Despite its internal troubles -- and regardless of whether or not it gains broader international acceptance -- EMU is the "TRNC's" only public university. As such, it seems likely to survive, if only as a "state"-subsidized symbol of pride, reliant on mediocre Turkish students who cannot make the grade elsewhere. But Rector Guven is a dogged advocate. If he survives the internal machinations against him, odds are he will continue to score modest

successes in making a name for EMU, even if the Holy Grail of Erasmus membership continues to elude him. Guven's apparent inability to implement fundamental academic reform is disheartening, however. The rector's row with the unions has weakened his ability to press for real academic change. Even if he survives, he will likely prove unable to improve EMU's mediocre academic performance.

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